

## MENDING THE AGENDA

"but i need you," i said.

her look told me that  
it was not my needs but hers  
we were discussing.

## OGRE ROOSTING

in the seminar someone asks,  
"does anyone know what happened  
to the children of  
ted hughes and sylvia plath?"

and i blurt out,

"he ate them."

SLAMMING THE OL' SIZE 13 BACK BETWEEN  
THE DENTURES

i ask her, "do you ever see geraldine?"

"not very often. why?"

"because i think she left her umbrella  
in class the night of the final. at least  
the guy who brought it up to me thought  
it was hers."

"is it red?" she asks.

and all i really have to reply is that, yes,  
it's red, one could say that it's red,

but instead for some reason i find it  
necessary to say, "actually it's more of a  
disgusting pink. i was humiliated carrying  
it back to my office. why? did geraldine  
tell you she'd lost a red umbrella?"

"no," she says, "but i loaned her one."

## AND THE GRAY MATTER PER CAPITA OF THE JUDGES?

florida courts have refused to declare brain-dead  
an infant born without a brain.



## AN IMMORTAL IN THE FLESH

i come out of my lower-division  
poetry writing class with two of  
the more talented students

and we are near the hot-dog cart  
when i spy an almost young man,  
frail and slightly bent, but possessed  
of a bright-eyed depth and virility,  
making his way across the campus  
with an armload of spanish books.

"you see that guy?" i say,  
"you are looking at a sure-fire future  
winner of the nobel prize."

they look at me as if, once again,  
i'm making some kind of inexplicable  
joke.

but this is no joke:

"that's raul zurita," i say,  
"the finest living poet in chile  
... make that in latin america."

the living part is significant,  
because he as easily could not be,  
having been tortured on a torture ship  
off the coast of his country  
in the days of the replacement  
of allende by pinochet.

one of them says, "gerry, you're shitting  
us again."

so i tell them how raul is here because  
my colleague in spanish-portuguese, Jack  
Schmitt, is now his translator for university  
of california press, and how raul has just  
returned from a reading tour of russia  
and the continent and how he will soon  
be touring america.

i explain that he speaks little english  
and i no spanish  
and he writes big oblique poems  
and i write short direct ones.

and yet there somehow from the first  
has been a warmth of camaraderie between us.

they say, "we just watched a world-class poet  
hunch incognito past the hot-dog cart?"

i say, "the greatest poet in spanish  
since neruda, is what they tell me,